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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : Robert M. Gates
Clair E. George

SUBJECT : Terrorism: Again

1. As Dick Kerr and Charlie Allen have briefed you over the telephone, people here in Washington, one more time, are flailing around trying to come up with options for retaliation for Libyan involvement in the attacks at the Rome and Vienna airports. State is all for military action and Defense is adamantly against it. Secretary Weinberger is said to be unconvinced of Libyan involvement. The NSC Staff is in the middle, and is proceeding very carefully. In short, you find the same options and the same disarray that characterized this government last summer and repeatedly before that.

2. There undoubtedly will be an NSC meeting after all the principals have returned to town early next week. We offer the following thoughts as a way of thinking through with you where we are and should be going given the paralysis that has beset this government on this issue since April of 1983, when our embassy was first attacked in Beirut.

3. Everyone is preoccupied with specific options in response to the recent specific acts. Various players in the government continue to look at options in the context of proving a direct connection between a potential target for retaliation and the atrocity that was committed. Indeed, not only do we

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continue to focus on pinpointing retaliation against specific terrorist groups but even individuals. This is obviously hopeless. You are aware of the detailed information that we have on responsibility of specific groups for the bombings of the embassy and other attacks over the past 2 1/2 years. In some cases, it is quite good; in others it has been less good but still adequate and persuasive as to ultimate culpability. Nevertheless, it is usually not evidence that will hold up in court -- and that seems to be what the administration seeks. The Department of Defense wants diplomatic or economic sanctions and the Department of State wants military action; each accuses the other of failure to carry out its responsibilities.

4. We continue to believe that the government is paralyzed at least in part because it still has no strategy. This government refuses to face up to the fact that it is in a war with Syria, Iran and Libya that goes beyond a bunch of nutty terrorists who strike at will. In most instances, we will not have enough specific evidence to enable the Department of Defense confidently to strike at a specific terrorist target knowing that it is hitting a place with a direct connection to a specific act. Even in those rare instances when we do have such evidence, for example the Sheik Abdullah barracks, the political will to act is absent.

5. The United States is being warred against by three states and we refuse to recognize or admit that because the implications are so significant. A single act of retaliation by the United States not only will not end the war, it will

intensify it, with more attacks against US citizens and installations abroad and with increasing likelihood even at home.

6. A strike of any kind will aggravate the US problem with terrorists. The question is whether that intensification will be for the short term or for the long term. Isolated acts of retaliation -- large or small -- will ensure that our terrorism problem will get worse indefinitely. Even the limited strike being considered will have implications for the travel of US citizens to the Middle East and Europe as well as for our embassies, US flag carriers, businessmen and so forth. To the best of our knowledge no one has even begun to think about these implications and what the US should do to minimize the cost in lives and property, not to mention seizure of numerous hostages. Again, recognizing that we are in a state of war is prerequisite to any kind of adequate plan dealing with these implications.

7. We would argue that a limited, one-time strike will bring all of the worst consequences of US action and virtually none of the benefits except short term satisfaction. What we view as necessary is presently perhaps politically unacceptable but in our judgment is the only realistic approach: declare openly that Syria, Libya and Iran are waging war against the United States in a new and exceptionally vicious way where only the innocent are killed, and that the United States will no longer permit it. We cannot stop individual acts of terrorism. The only way, over time, to get on top of this problem is, to quote Secretary Haig, "is to go to the source." US military

action on a broad scale aimed at imposing a high cost on the military and security capabilities of Iran, Libya, and perhaps even Syria is necessary. We have to make the cost for support of terrorism so high that these states cease that support. Going after their military, intelligence, and security capabilities hits them not only where we are politically most secure (as opposed to civilian or quasi-civilian targets) but also where they are most vulnerable. We would have to make clear that we are prepared to continue such attacks if terrorism continues. The first such round of attacks would be heralded (after they began) with a Presidential speech to the Congress declaring war on terrorism and the states that support it. Other measures might include closing Beirut airport (!), sabotaging the Libyan oil terminals, or other such targets.

8. The magnitude of what we suggest undoubtedly would take the breath away of the NSC principals. Nonetheless, the principals must be realistic about the consequences of doing anything less. Doing nothing simply invites more terrorism. Limited retaliation, particularly at peripheral installations such as terrorist training camps, also will only intensify the one-sided war. Moreover, it will serve as a political pretext for more aggressive action against US targets and generally display a lack of US resoluteness.

9. The NSC last summer unanimously rejected the idea of a military effort to overthrow Qadhafi. There are obvious risks involved in major attacks on sovereign states, particularly in the case of Iran. Such attacks might offer opportunities to the

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Soviets, although we would argue that the Soviets face real inhibitions in both Iran and Libya at this time that would reduce those risks to acceptable levels.

10. Our bottom line is deep concern that no one is doing any long range thinking about options, what we want to achieve and how we can achieve it. We believe that the most likely options under consideration now -- doing nothing/holding the Israelis' coat or a limited, one-time military strike offer only intensified terrorists acts against the US at little or no costs to the governments supporting them. Any action must be seen as the first step in a larger campaign and we must have some view of what we do next when the subsequent terrorist acts occur. Sadly, after all this time, we sense a genuine lack of political will at senior levels of government to develop the kind of strategy that is meaningful, has the potential for success, and then to implement it. How many more Americans must die before we face up to the states that sustain and launch Hizballah, Abu Nidal, Force 17, Amal and myriad other Middle East murderers. War has been declared on us and refusing to acknowledge it won't make it go away.

11. A set of papers is supposedly to be sent out today to the principals with the possibility of a conference call at "some point". We will keep you informed and obviously look forward to hearing your reactions to the above upon your return.

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